

Pltfalls of Love for Greta Gerwig in 'Lola Versus'

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Greta Gerwig is now being recognized in the movie universe, and has climbed a ladder from micro-budget independent (“Baghead”) to mainstream monstrosities (the “Arthur” remake). She takes the lead role in “Lola Versus,” and anchors a terrific story about “settling down” and the decisions behind that certain time of life.

This is somewhat of a romantic comedy, if trying to love one’s self can be considered romantic. Gerwig hits the right notes as Lola, a 29 year-old woman experiencing a reversal of fortune in a tumultuous year. It’s that edge of turning 30 that defines her circumstance, and the supporting characters around her both contribute to and share in that dilemma. The resulting story is honest, snappy, poignant and sweet, as men and women clueless to their own needs and desires try to navigate the chemistry of relationships.

Lola (Gerwig) seemingly has it all. She lives with her longtime boyfriend Luke (Joel Kinnaman) in New York City, she is encouraged to complete her doctorate and she has just celebrated her 29th birthday by Luke asking for her hand in marriage. She is simply bubbling with anticipation for both the wedding and the rest of her life. But one day she comes home to observe that Luke is distraught. It seems he has had a change of heart. The wedding is called off, the couple separate and the world that once brought only happiness to Lola has fallen apart.



Zoe Lister Jones (Alice) and Greta Gerwig (Lola) in 'Lola Versus'
Photo credit: Myles Aronowitz for Fox Searchlight Pictures

Luckily she has her best friends, Alice (Zoe Lister Jones) and Henry (Hamish Linklater), plus her supportive parents (Debra Winger and Bill Pullman). She cries on the shoulders of both Alice and Henry, then slowly begins to navigate the dating waters again. Throughout the rest of her 29th year, she will learn who is most loyal to her, what her ex-fiance has in store and which relationships she can trust. It’s called life, and

we all meet at the bar after work.

This film is blessedly honest and natural, especially through Greta Gerwig's performance. She is neither a martyr nor a victim, but she has to react, as any human being would, to what the journey throws at her. It is a complete character, set up properly and follow through succinctly right through her 29th to 30th year. It's her frustration that is best portrayed, as that becomes the overriding emotion when everything starts to unravel. Frustration is innate in what any emotionally healthy person would experience, in tandem with the normal sadness, anger and denial of a break-up.

The supporting cast is sublime as well. Zoe Lister Jones (from the TV show "Whitney") nearly steals the film with her flaky Alice persona. She is just on the edge of being too much (she practices wacky self medication to a fault), but when a surprising development in an old friendship conflicts with consoling Lola, she handles the scenes with endearing subtlety. The way her smile lights up in a pivotal scene is worth the whole character.

Joel Kinnaman as the ex-fiance handles some bad mojo very well, considering he's somewhat of a villain, and his indecisiveness continues the film's pattern of honesty. Hammish Linklater, excellent in last year's "The Future," embraces Henry with a perfect befuddlement. His character is pulled in many different directions, but he accomplishes all the emotional tasks. The old pros Bill Pullman (who is surprisingly haggard) and Debra Winger add some depth to "the parents" that make the roles much more lucid and wise. Pullman obviously relishes his "hippie Dad" opportunity.



Reflective: Ex-Lovers Joel Kinnaman (Luke) and Greta Gerwig in 'Lola Versus'
Photo credit: Myles Aronowitz for Fox Searchlight Pictures

If there is a slight criticism, it would be the screenplay (co-written by director Daryl Wein and Zoe Lister Jones). There was a few lines of dialogue in it that were just a bit too precious and show-offish, and the Alice character is the one who delivers most of them. Ms. Lister couldn't help herself, apparently. Otherwise if you ever have gone through this time of life and experience – especially in an urban setting – "Lola Versus" will provide a punch to the emotional solar plexus with its accurate reminder.

It's also a perfect example of up-and-coming young filmmakers and actors pooling their resources – in a legitimate story of relationship maneuvering – around the exquisite performance of Greta Gerwig. Turn on the projector, boys and girls, as a star lights up the screen.

"Lola Versus" continues its release in Chicago on June 15th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Greta Gerwig, Zoe Lister Jones, Joel Kinnaman, Hamish Linklater, Debra Winger and Bill Pullman. Screenplay by Daryl Wein and Zoe Lister Jones. Directed by Daryl Wein. Rated "R"



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